

Strad
Selection



Chamber disc **Brahms** String Quartet no.1 in
C minor op.51 no.1 **Gernsheim** String Quartet

no.2 in A minor op.31

Mandelring Quartet AUDITE 97.503



Mandelring Quartet:
enraptured affection

This is the first in a series of three quartet discs recorded with arresting power and amplitude back in 1999, but only recently commercially issued. They enterprisingly couple Brahms's masterly contributions to the genre with previously unrecorded works by Friedrich Gernsheim, Heinrich Freiherr von Herzogenberg and Felix Dessoff respectively. Gernsheim (1839–1916) was a prodigy pianist, violinist and composer during an age of prodigies, when only the most staggeringly individual and gifted stood any

chance of making it to the top. He was a student of Moscheles and David, teacher of Humperdinck and friend of Lalo, Saint-Saëns, Rossini and most significantly Brahms, and his supreme gifts fell just short of true genius. If the first movement of the Second Quartet feels like a lyrically expansive take on Brahms's op.51, the Scherzo suggests more than a passing acquaintance with Mendelssohn's E minor Quartet, while the finale's driving march rhythms are straight out of the Schumann copybook.

The gifted Mandelring Quartet – brothers Sebastian (violin) and Bernhard Schmidt (cello), sister Nanette (viola) and violist Michael Scheitzbach – play this delightful work with such unfailing sensitivity and enraptured affection (not to say technical aplomb) that you'd have thought it was central repertoire they'd been playing for years.

The real test, however, is Brahms's notoriously terse, contrapuntally imposing yet tantalisingly deeply felt C minor Quartet, the finest quartet ever composed in my estimation. Here the Mandelring combine the LaSalle Quartet's intellectual vigour with the Amadeus's unbridled passion to provide the best of both worlds. Only the Gabrieli Quartet (Decca) strikes me as the Mandelring's expressive equal here.

JULIAN HAYLOCK